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# THE LITERACY CHALLENGE

The United States and the District of Columbia face a significant literacy challenge, due to a dramatic transformation of the nation's economy -- from industrial to knowledge-based. More than ever before, most aspects of daily life now require complex skills and knowledge. Finding work and doing it well, helping children with schoolwork, using computers and the Internet, following doctors' instructions, and countless other common activities demand strong literacy skills.

Today, literacy represents a broad range of skills, including reading, writing, speaking, calculating, and critical thinking. For purposes of this paper, a working definition of literacy is:

[a]n individual's ability to read, write, speak English, compute, and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to obtain, retain, and advance in the workplace or administer a small business; effectively encourage and support his or her children's success in school; access information using modern technology; advocate for self and family in all life situations; and participate fully in the democratic process.

Traditionally, literacy has been seen as an individual's problem. There is consensus among public officials, service providers, employers, and the community in general, however, that literacy is a public issue with important consequences for society. Strengthening the city's adult education services means supporting policy priorities such as economic and workforce development, families' well-being, education reform, civic engagement, and a host of others. For that reason, the administration will work with the Council to identify up to \$10 million to begin a multi-year effort to ensure that District adults have strong literacy skills.

## **Why Literacy is a Priority for the District**

### *Economic Development*

Economic development has been a primary focus of the Williams administration. Businesses that can easily find qualified workers are more likely to stay in the city and continue contributing to its economic and civic life. A February 2001 survey of more than 300 District businesses found that more than two-thirds reported trouble hiring local adults. Many of those businesses cited poor basic skills as a principal cause of their trouble. This situation suggests that developing the city's human capital must be an essential companion to the administration's business development strategy.

### *Income*

Research published in the 2000 edition of *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy* showed for the first time that stronger literacy skills translate to a higher income at every level of educational attainment. For instance, someone with a high school diploma or GED with very high literacy skills earns almost \$10,000 a year more than a person with the same

credential but very low literacy skills. The pattern also holds true for people with two-year and four-year degrees; stronger literacy skills translate to higher incomes even with the same level of education.

The results of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), the most recent national survey of adults' literacy skills, also make clear the differences in labor force participation and earnings of adults with varying literacy skills. Adults with very low skills worked an average of 19 weeks and had median earnings of \$230 per week. Adults with high skills, on the other hand, worked an average of 38 weeks and had median earnings of \$462 per week.

### *Welfare Reform*

In March 2002, more than 2,700 District residents that receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) will lose eligibility due to the federally mandated time limits (see Chapter 10). As this time limit approaches, it is imperative for adults in these families to prepare themselves for gainful employment. While many factors play a role in the successful transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency, including labor market characteristics, child care requirements, domestic violence, and substance abuse, the level of a TANF recipient's literacy skills is critical.

One estimate suggests that as many as 90 percent of the District's TANF recipients lack a high school diploma or GED. Research published in the February 2001 volume of *The Monthly Labor Review* found significant financial benefits for female high school drop-outs who earned GEDs within three years after dropping out. These women, most of whom had children, were found to have incomes 25 percent higher than women who did not have GEDs. Women who had GEDs and attended a year of job training or college had incomes that were 50 percent higher than women who had neither.

### *Education Reform*

The most important ingredients for children's academic success are school and family. Improving the city's school system has been one of the administration's highest priorities. Coupled with more vigorous efforts to improve parents' literacy skills, education reform will live up to its promise. When parents have strong literacy skills, they are more able to take an active role in supporting their children's education, from teaching important oral language and reading skills to pre-schoolers to participating in meetings with teachers and school administration and helping with homework assignments. The educational attainment of a child's primary caregiver continues to be one of the strongest predictors' of the child's school success.

### *Family Health and Well-Being*

In addition to the positive effects of parents' education and literacy skills on their children's schooling, parents' income is also related to their children's economic well-being and health. According to the 1999 edition of *Young Children in Poverty: A Statistical Update*, 62.5 percent of high school dropouts have poor children compared to 29.2 percent of high school graduates and 8.9 percent of parents with some college. A 1996 report from the Forum on Child and Family Statistics also found that only 65 percent of children living below the poverty line were in very good or excellent health compared to 84 percent of children living above the poverty line.

Adults with literacy needs often lack the necessary skills to find and understand health-related information and, as a result, often fail to engage in preventive health and early detection practices. A study by doctors at Emory University School of Medicine found that more than 35 percent of English-speaking and 65 percent of Spanish-speaking patients had poor “health literacy” skills that made them more likely than other patients to misunderstand medication instructions, miss return appointments, struggle to find the hospital itself and the appropriate offices within the hospital, and understand informed consent. These patients’ literacy skills also were linked to poor self-management of diabetes and hypertension.

### *Civic Engagement*

Stronger literacy skills are also linked to participation in the democratic process. Those with lower literacy levels may have difficulty reading and understanding ballots that are moderately complex in their design (as evidenced by the 2000 presidential election). As a result, they are less likely to vote and, if they do, have a higher chance of making an error during the process (i.e. marking the ballot incorrectly or not following the written directions).

### *Public Safety and Corrections*

Finally, there is a correlation between low literacy and involvement in the correctional system. *Literacy Behind Prison Walls*, a national study based on the NALS, found that two-thirds of the country’s nearly one million prisoners are less literate than the general adult population. Prison inmates are over-represented in the lowest literacy levels and only slightly represented in the highest literacy levels. Former offenders with poor skills are often unable to find employment, partly due to a lack of literacy skills, and are often reincarcerated. By contrast, an extremely rigorous study of evaluations of prison education programs found that inmates who actively participate in education programs have a significantly lower likelihood of recidivism.

## **Adults in Need: National and Local Snapshots**

Although very few adults in the United States cannot read or write at all, there are many adults with low literacy skills. Between 21 and 23 percent of the adult population, approximately 44 million people, according to the NALS, scored in the lowest level of literacy, Level 1. Almost all adults in Level 1 can read, but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a simple story to a child.

Table 11-1  
Abilities at Lowest Literacy Level

Level One Adult CAN:	Level One Adult CANNOT:
· Locate expiration date information on a driver’s license	· Locate eligibility from a table of employee benefits
· Sign his or her name	· Locate intersections on a map
· Total a bank deposit entry	· Identify background information on a social security card

Another 25 to 28 percent of the adult population, or between 45 and 50 million people, scored in Level 2. Adults in Level 2 usually can perform more complex tasks such as comparing, contrasting, or integrating pieces of information but not to the same extent as adults in Level 3 and above. For instance, adults in Level 2 would not be able to make travel arrangements for a meeting using flight schedules; whereas adults in Level 3 would be able to perform this activity.

Literacy experts believe that adults with skills at Levels 1 and 2 lack a sufficient foundation of basic skills to meet today's challenges. The National Governors Association has agreed that adults need at least Level 3 skills to compete and succeed in a knowledge-based economy.

The NALS did not collect state-level data unless a state paid for this service, which the District decided not to do. Therefore, there is no NALS data on the literacy levels of the city's adults. A National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) study that combined national NALS data with 1990 Census data provides synthetic estimates of state, county, and city populations' literacy levels, including the District's, but the accuracy of the District's figures is limited by the methodology. In the absence of better figures, however, the study suggests that 37 percent of the city's adult population have Level 1 literacy skills. District agencies provide the following estimates:

- The State Education Agency (SEA)-Adult Education, which is primarily responsible for adult education services in the District, suggests that more than 130,000 adult residents lack a high school diploma or GED.
- The Department of Employment Services (DOES) estimates that more than 52,000 economically disadvantaged residents are eligible for job training and workforce development services.

### **Current Adult Basic Education Services**

The Adult Basic Education (ABE) system includes literacy classes at several levels, GED classes, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Despite deeply reduced budgets from 1995 through 2000, the ABE system has been taking important steps toward program improvement. For example, every program that receives SEA funds now has at least five computers on site. Staff from every program also has received training in evaluating screening tools, choosing curriculum materials, and using teaching techniques effective for adults with learning disabilities through NIFL's state-of-the-art *Bridges to Practice* guide. Other professional development classes covered mathematics technology, teaching techniques, and program management issues.

Many of these classes are offered in the context of family literacy. Family literacy programs, such as Even Start, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, typically include four components: ABE classes for parents, parenting classes, pre-school classes, and parent-and-child-together time. The combination of these classes supports family-centered educational programs that involve parents and children in a cooperative effort to help parents become full partners in the education of their children and to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners. The new President of the DC Board of Education

and the Superintendent have spoken strongly about the imperative of expanding family literacy programs.

In addition to the SEA and DOES, other principal providers of adult education services include the Department of Human Services, District of Columbia Public Schools, and District of Columbia Public Library. City employees who want to improve their literacy and computer skills can attend classes funded by the Office of Personnel's Center for Workforce Development.. Other pivotal partners include, but are not limited to: Department of Mental Health, Office on Aging, DC Housing Authority, Department of Housing and Community Development, DC Superior Court and Juvenile Court System, Department of Corrections, Department of Parks and Recreation, and the business, faith-based, and higher education communities. Valuable work is also provided by 80 privately funded organizations throughout the District for approximately 2,500 adults. The chart below describes a sample of those providing educational and employment training services in the District using public funds.

Table 11-2  
Sample of District of Columbia Adult Education Services

<b>Funding Agency</b>	<b>Provider(s)</b>	<b>Services</b>	<b>Clients</b>	<b># Served</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<i>UDC/SEA</i>	21 grantees throughout city	Basic skills, GED prep and testing, ESOL	US citizens and legal residents	2,828	\$3 million federal and local funds
<i>DHS</i>	16 grantees throughout city	Workplace-oriented basic skills, GED prep, ESOL	TANF recipients, low-income residents	Up to 1,500	\$3.5 million federal funds
<i>DOES</i>	DOES	Workplace-oriented basic skills, referrals to attend other adult education classes	Low-income residents, including TANF	Agency unable to provide figure.	Agency unable to provide figure.
<i>Office of Personnel, CWD</i>	DC government	Vocabulary and reading development, writing skills, refresher math, analytical and reasoning skills	DC government employees	184	\$50,000 Local funds
<i>DCPS</i>	Even Start	Family literacy	Low-income families	500 – 600 families	\$697,000 federal funds
<i>DCPS</i>	Head Start	Family literacy	Low-income families	75 families	\$150,000 federal funds
<i>DCPL</i>	libraries	Professional development classes, Literacy Resource Center, computer lab, Literacy Helpline, GED practice tests	Program staff, instructors, students	4,773	\$212,328 federal funds

The best available figures listed above estimate that city agencies funding literacy and basic skills training reach at least 9700 residents. The true figure is undoubtedly higher, but differences in program reporting requirements make it very difficult to identify one number. For instance, participants in DOES-sponsored occupational training courses may receive

basic skills training at the same time they receive job training, depending on the requirements of the job. However, the agency does not track the number of students studying basic skills because only occupational outcomes are measured.

Below is a more detailed description of the administrative structure, funding, student enrollment, student achievement, and collaborative efforts of the District's literacy programs.

#### *Administrative Structure*

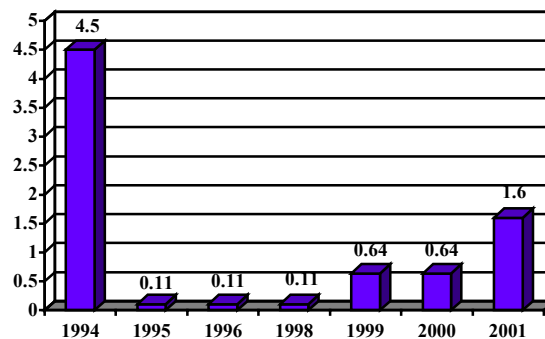
In 1999, the SEA-Adult Education was transferred from the District of Columbia Public Schools to the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). UDC's Board of Trustees, in setting policy for adult education, made the President of the University the District's state adult education officer. The President delegated day-to-day authority to the Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs. They, in turn, delegated authority to the Dean of the Community Outreach and Extension Services to whom the SEA directly reports.

#### *Funding*

While the federal allocation to the District has risen steadily since 1996, city funding for the ABE system has been erratic.

Figure 11-1

District Spending for Adult Basic Education (in \$ millions)

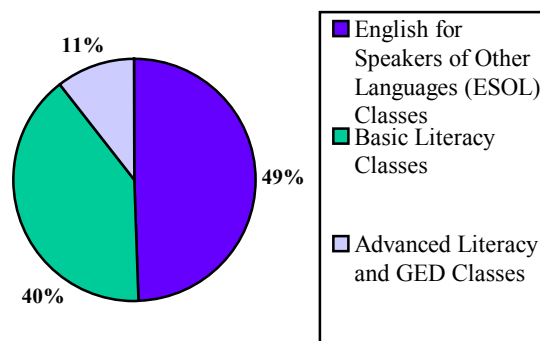


It is imperative that the District continue to invest considerable resources in adult literacy programs and services to ensure that city residents are able to lead productive lives.

#### *Student Enrollment and Characteristics*

According to the SEA's report to the U.S. Department of Education for program year 1999 to 2000, almost half of the students served through SEA programs, or slightly more than 1,400, were adults learning English in ESOL classes. The next largest group, adults in basic literacy classes, numbered 1,125. Only 299 adult students attended more advanced literacy and GED classes.

Figure 11-2  
DC Enrollment in Adult Basic Education by Class Type



More than half of the ESOL learners were Latino men and women in beginning level classes. Slightly more than 150 students received ABE services as part of family literacy programs and 19 attended programs for the homeless.

### *Student Achievement*

Student achievement in the District's ABE system varied widely, as represented by the measurement categories now mandated by the new National Reporting System for every ABE program that receives any federal funds. Two groups of advanced ESOL students completed their levels at the rate of 71 percent and 94 percent. Sixty-eight percent of the students whose primary or secondary goal was to retain employment did so, and 49 percent whose primary or secondary goal was to begin employment succeeded in finding jobs. Forty-four percent of those in family literacy programs with an employment goal also achieved that goal. Several groups of students in higher level literacy classes also completed their levels around the rate of 40 percent. At the same time, other students in the two most basic literacy classes completed their levels at the rate of 14 percent and 12 percent.

### *Collaborative Efforts*

Federal education and job-training programs have long functioned as very separate bureaucracies despite the similarities of their clients and the strong relationship between education, job skills, and economic self-sufficiency. The Workforce Investment Act, passed in 1998, was designed to improve coordination among these systems to reflect those relationships and help adults receive a streamlined, coherent combination of services.

In the District, efforts to cross bureaucratic lines to coordinate services are underway. The SEA and DOES have a Memorandum of Understanding that allows ABE providers to assess and refer their students to DOES for job counseling. It also provides for DOES to refer residents who do not have the basic skills required to begin job training services to ABE providers. As this relationship develops, the challenge will be to continue these collaborative efforts while ensuring that students with lower basic skills still receive the job training services that are fundamental to employment and higher incomes.

Under the authority of the Workforce Investment Act, the District created the Workforce Investment Council (WIC) whose membership includes key leaders from government, the

business and education sectors, and others areas of society. The WIC has identified literacy enhancement as one of its priorities and, in fulfillment of the U.S. Department of Labor's funding requirements, is producing a unified plan for literacy that will incorporate the goals of various agencies engaged in literacy activities.

The SEA has also completed a state plan for submission to the U.S. Department of Education, which includes funded initiatives and goals for the city.

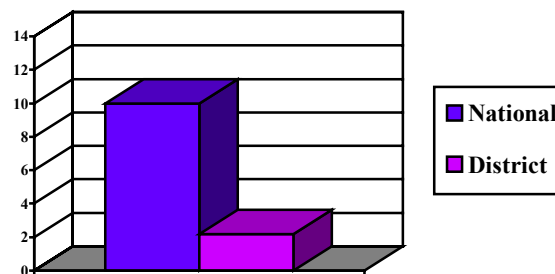
### **Important Comparisons to the National System of ABE Services**

Placing the District's ABE system in the context of national services underlines some important similarities and differences.

#### *Services Not Meeting Need*

There is a significant difference between the proportion of students served and those who need services at the national level and the local level. Nationally, there were 4 million students enrolled in ABE classes in program year 1998, according to the U.S. Department of Education, which represents approximately ten percent of those who need stronger literacy skills. While some might find the national figure astonishing, of equal concern is the fact that, by the best estimates, the District's ABE system serves less than three percent of city residents in need.

Figure 11-3  
Percentage of Students In Need Who Are Served



#### *The Effect of Changing Demographics*

Both the national and local systems have experienced a significant increase in the number of students who register for ESOL classes. The national trend of growing enrollment of students in ESOL classes has been underway since 1980. In fact, enrollment has doubled since then. Today, at both the national and local levels, nearly half of all ABE students are ESOL students. This trend presents important challenges for the ABE system because basic research is still being conducted to understand how best to teach English to non-native speakers, especially those who are not literate in their native languages.

#### *State Spending Compared to the Need*

Spending trends have varied considerably at the federal, state, and local levels, and the District has been at the very low end in recent years. At the federal level, spending has more than doubled since 1996 from \$247 million to \$540 million, including increases earmarked for special projects as well as increases for direct services. Levels of state spending have



been mixed, ranging from four states that contribute only the minimum required match of cash or in-kind services to states like Massachusetts that have increased their ABE system contribution at triple the federal allocation.

Comparing state spending with need, however, shows that the District spends significantly less than the national average.

### **Continuing Challenges and National Lessons**

The District faces numerous challenges in delivering quality adult education services to its residents.

#### *Accountability and Oversight*

Accountability for adult literacy services is extremely diffuse. According to DC Code 31-1520(a), UDC, via the SEA, is the sole state agency responsible for supervision of adult education services in the public schools. In addition, as evidenced above, over ten other agencies and many private providers administer adult literacy services in the city. There is insufficient coordination of these services and their funding is generally not coordinated with citywide goals. In addition, it is difficult to hold private providers to the same standards, as they are not necessarily required to align their goals and funding in the same manner as those programs receiving public funds.

The reporting structure of the SEA within UDC also presents various challenges. As described above, there are three reporting entities between the SEA and the President of the University.

In addition, the President of the University maintains signature authority over all funding and there was significant confusion regarding the appropriation of the funding authorized for adult education services in FY2001.

#### *Maximizing Resources*

Diffuse accountability has not provided the impetus to combine and coordinate resources in ways that leverage greater results. For example, DOES has had to turn to educational institutions other than UDC for some of its instructional needs. Funding sources for transportation, for example, are made available to students in all citywide programs. The considerable resources spent on child care slots for various city programs are not necessarily linked with the needs of adults in literacy programs. Computer labs operated by DOES and the Department of Parks and Recreation may go unused at the same time that District-funded adult literacy activities might be curtailed by a lack of such resources.

#### *Underfunding*

While agencies are working within their funding constraints, the result is that the District is serving less than three percent of those with the lowest literacy skills. Infrastructure is improving as evidenced by the SEA's investment in computer equipment for its grantees. However, there is still considerable need for additional resources, including technological software, professional development and training, instructional materials, transportation, etc.

#### *Growing Magnitude of Problem*

The District continues to have a high dropout rate (as high as 37 percent by some estimates) and many of those who *are* graduating from the DC public schools are ill-equipped with

basic skills needed to enter college or the workplace. TANF recipients are leaving the rolls and former offenders are returning to society with the same shortage of education and skills. Employers need employees with higher level of skills making it a necessity to properly educate all residents, particularly these rising populations.

### *Research and Assessment*

Unfortunately, there is a lack of research and evaluation funding to develop reliable information on the literacy challenge facing the District. By not participating in the NALS and not conducting a reliable, citywide needs assessment, policy makers and service providers must depend on synthetic estimates and individual assessments of their own clients to gain a picture of the District's need.

### *Stigma*

The stigma of lacking sufficient skills continues to be pervasive throughout the city. In many cases, the stigma prevents citizens from admitting their challenges and taking advantage of available literacy services.

## **Best Practices from Other Jurisdictions**

As the District works to create a citywide adult literacy initiative, it is important to learn from national models that have been the most successful in addressing these challenges.

- New York's Education for Gainful Employment (EDGE) combines unpaid work experience with work-related basic education, ESOL instruction, GED preparation, job readiness and life skills training, and job development. Classroom instruction is included in the state's definition of work experience to meet the federal work participation requirement. Funded with a combination of federal and state resources, EDGE serves over 30,000 people at a cost of less than \$3,500 per participant. Participating programs must meet 90-day employment retention targets. The District can benefit from this model because it breaks down agency "stovepipes" and implements a strategy that is in the best interest of those seeking to enhance their skills while earning a living, particularly the TANF population and those who have served time in a correctional facility.
- Michigan's Workforce Development Boards were allocated \$12.5 million to fund post-employment training for working welfare recipients. Participants are trained in skilled positions in demand in that region, such as computer systems administrator, robotics specialist, and productivity software manager. Approximately 85 percent of the program graduates no longer receive cash assistance, with many having received promotions and raises, and are returning to school. Michigan shows that supporting students after they are employed is very important to their continued success. The District has implemented such a strategy as well, although this model can inform the District's thinking as the WIC formulates its role in addressing literacy issues.
- North Carolina's Community College System's Basic Skill Section is accountable for adult education and family literacy programs in the state. The system works with North Carolina's government agencies to ensure that programs are in place that will meet the needs of citizens who need basic skills/literacy services. This model serves as an excellent example of holding the community college accountable in partnership with

those agencies that also deliver services. Using the community college also reduces the stigma because clients see themselves as college students taking basic skills classes.

## **The Literacy Initiative**

Confronting the District's literacy challenge will take many years and require significant resources, determination, and a willingness to move beyond traditional thinking about adult education and job training services. Even \$10 million is just the beginning of a multi-year, citywide initiative designed to raise the literacy skills of the city's adults. In subsequent years, funding will focus less on capacity building and more on increasing the number served and the quality of the services they receive.

### *Guiding Principles and Goals*

As the administration engages government agencies and community partners in developing this initiative, the following working principles will guide its progress:

- Improve coordination among city agencies that provide education, basic skills, job training and retention, and social services;
- Rely on community-based providers to deliver services;
- Pursue opportunities to develop public-private partnerships;
- Remove the stigma associated with low literacy skills and applaud individual efforts;
- Emphasize and support high-quality classroom instruction; and
- Stress outcomes and accountability.

### *Expanded Accountability Structure*

As described earlier, because the SEA is housed at UDC, the university is both the policy-making body, responsible for the oversight of adult education services, and one of the service providers competing for funds from the SEA to deliver services. There is concern that this represents an inherent conflict. Addressing this question requires dialogue about two important ideas: the mission of UDC and the best ways to instill more cross-agency cooperation. There are at least two options for aligning policy and service provision:

1. SEA remains within UDC with enhanced oversight by the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, and Families. In order to mitigate the perceived conflict of interest, it has been suggested that a set amount of funds be reserved for UDC as a service provider and that the university not compete for the remaining funds. However, the reporting structure described earlier must still be addressed. Since literacy is a major priority in the District, the SEA could be a direct report to the University President and Board of Directors, thereby erasing the other three reporting levels. The President would work closely with the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth and Families to ensure that the university is accountable for adult education services and that the government agencies that provide educational and employment training maximize cooperation. Legislation could also ensure that there is less confusion regarding the funding appropriated to the SEA for providing adult education services.
2. Move responsibility for policy and oversight to the office of the Deputy Mayor for Children Youth and Families and retain UDC as one of the primary providers for adult literacy services. While not prohibited by federal adult education law, there is no precedent for placing adult education directly in the Mayor's office. The primary benefit

of this structure is that there is an existing structure to coordinate the activities of the principal executive branch agencies involved in adult education.

Under any scenario, considerable discussion will occur during the first year to ensure that the initiative has an accountability structure that optimizes cross-agency and citywide collaboration and ensures quality services for those in need.

#### *Fund Infrastructure, Capacity-Building, and Direct Services*

The Initiative should fund essential quality improvements such as professional development for instructors, new curriculum materials, and additional computers. Furthermore, these funds would support additional community-based adult education providers and expand the capacity of existing providers. Many programs already have waiting lists, but lack the funds to hire additional teachers. In some cases, capacity is constrained by the size of buildings. Adding resources for direct program services will begin the process of making services more accessible to greater numbers of the District's adults. Specifically, resources will be allocated to building the capacity of programs serving the learning disabled and ESOL students as well as those focusing on family literacy and workplace/contextual learning. In addition, funding will focus on those areas in the city where there is the greatest need. A majority of the funds will be used to develop capacity and build infrastructure.

#### *Support TANF Families*

Evaluations of employment programs for women leaving welfare for work have shown that steady work by itself will not lead to higher wages. As noted earlier in this chapter, an individual's literacy skills and education are important to economic self-sufficiency. The SEA, DHS, and DOES are expanding their collaborative efforts to continue upgrading the skills of those leaving TANF for work. This initiative will feed into the work being done by these agencies to affect the 2,700 families leaving the TANF roles, particularly the 1,000 adults identified by DOES as hardest to employ.

#### *Raise Public Awareness and Understanding*

Additional city funds will allow the development of a public awareness campaign using print, radio, and television messages, public events, and other means of informing the community about the benefits of stronger literacy skills for citizens and the city. Steps will be taken to ensure that the promise for services does not overestimate the capacity of city programs to provide these services. For this reason, the campaign will be designed along a parallel track with increasing program capacity. Learners, adult education and literacy providers, policymakers, employers, volunteers, and citizens who understand and value literacy will collaborate in the first year to develop this citywide campaign and estimate the resources needed to be successful.

#### *Engage the Full Participation of Business and Other Sectors*

This initiative must be owned by the entire city. Because literacy has such wide-ranging public implications, every sector's active participation is essential to its success. The business community has recognized the effect literacy has on its sector and must now become part of the solution. The same is true for the media, faith community, private funders, and others. Every sector has a special role to play and will be encouraged to contribute in appropriate ways.

### *Leverage Federal Resources*

Considering the staggering challenge the District faces in addressing the literacy needs in its communities, local funds will not be enough. It is imperative that District agencies and community-based organizations continue to leverage federal resources to complement the District's share.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Implementing these strategies with the initial investments described above will bring the District closer to achieving meaningful, measurable outcomes. Because there has not been a complete needs assessment performed on District programs and services, it is difficult to describe specifically the likely impact of these strategies. However, one can expect that there will be an increased number of city adults:

- Enrolled and retained in literacy programs;
- Passing the GED;
- Finding gainful employment and keeping jobs;
- Enrolled in higher education;
- Learning basic computer skills; and
- Participating in their children's schooling.

### **Conclusion**

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Similarly, the strength of the District depends on the success of its residents. An investment in improving the literacy levels of its residents must be seen as an investment in a range of important policy areas, which include economic development, public safety, and education, health, and welfare reform.